

POLITICAL NOTES

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Revolt in the East Indies

I. Indonesian workers and peasants are challenging 3 centuries of oppression and plunder. The uprising in Java has intensified the discontent of the Arabs in the Middle East, the civil war in China, the revolt in Indo-China. It has the power to tear Dutch capitalism from its seat, to shake decisively British imperialism, to crystallize the incipient unrest all over Asia.

This struggle is not something which grew up overnight. It is an expression of the burning resentment which smolders continuously in the breasts of super-exploited colonial workers and peasants. Nor is this the first time that an outbreak has occurred.

In 1926 there was an uprising in Java led by Communists and left-wing nationalists. It was crushed and 1200 were sent to prison camp in New Guinea. One report says that afterwards the Communist Party made a deal with the nationalists, subordinating its program and handing over its apparatus.

Because the Indies are a source of agricultural goods and export huge quantities, the depression hit them very hard. The imperialists stopped production, gathered in their super-profits and sat back while the masses starved on their overcrowded little rice paddies. In the early 30's and again in the mid-30's, dissatisfaction burst out in riots, strikes, demonstrations.

In 1941 the Netherlands Indies fell to Japan along with Singapore. The workers and peasants of the whole surrounding area did not deem it worth while to defend the outposts of their imperialist oppressors. Had there been a Marxist party, this universal passive defeatism could have been transformed into revolutionary defeatism. The situation created by Dutch and British imperialism, aggravated by Japanese imperialism, was ripe for revolutionary action. Unfortunately, no organized working class force, to our knowledge, utilized it.

Wilhelmina in 1942 had to promise independence as a condition for support of the war. Dutch imperialism's standing was very low, despite the heavy hand of temporarily victorious Japanese imperialism. As suffering increased with the war, so too did the unrest. The bald way in which the territory was handed back to the Netherlands probably was the last straw.

II. The Netherlands East Indies are at the same time the richest natural area in the world and the most densely populated. They supply practically all of the world's quinine, 31% of its copra, 17% of the tin, 33% of the rubber, 20% of the sisal, 29% of the palm oil, as well as oil, tea, cane sugar, coffee. Population density in Java and Madura is 800 per square mile; in Belgium it is 670, Italy, 340, India, 190.

This combination makes the territory particularly valuable. The country in a position to extract the products and use the native labor supply occupies an enviable position in the world market. Dutch returns from the Netherlands Indies were 156.48 million florins in 1940. (a florin is 40c). Holland controlled entirely the agricultural loan banks, shipping, public utilities and several other enterprises. Sugar investments - 1/6 of her total returns - and private railroads and trams were 95% Dutch-controlled. Tin, 90%. Rubber and other agricultural investments accounted for 1/3 her returns and were 60% Dutch-controlled. Oil made up 1/5 of her returns and was 40% Dutch.

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This small nation has maintained her stranglehold over Indonesian economy thru the aid of British imperialism which regards the area as strategically important to her Far Eastern bastion of Singapore, India, etc. England also has heavy investments in the islands. The relationship between the 2 countries is revealed by the fact the British military has assumed leadership in crushing the revolt.

US imperialism also is interested in exploiting the area. American investments by 1940 were \$200 million - almost triple the 1936 figure - concentrated mainly in oil and rubber. In 1944, \$100 million credit was extended to Dutch capitalists so they could use US banking channels to conduct their business. This was followed by a \$500 million Export-Import Bank loan in July 1945. The Bank at the same time announced its readiness to give additional credit to the Netherlands East Indies Colonial Government. An article in the Chicago SUN (11/3-45) very aptly sums up the significance of these transactions:

"Since the normal term of such loans runs for 15 to 30 years, the governmental extension of credit will have the effect of underwriting for that period the Dutch regime which the Indonesian groups are challenging under the leadership of Dr. I. R. Soekarno."

US cash is tied up and yields profits on the basis of a system of colonial exploitation which is the worst in the world.

III. It is hard to get an adequate picture of the background of the present uprising. Capitalist sources are concerned primarily with the Indies as an income- or material-producing source. Their liberal stoges present matters as always in process of improvement. The labor press has for the most part dealt very little with the problems of the Indonesian working class. Bare facts gleaned from these sources cannot convey one-tenth the misery and horror of living under the heel of imperialism. Microscopic wages, high interest, repressive laws altogether do not depict the actual social relations, conditions of work and life, the callous brutality with which imperialism tramples on its subjects.

Dutch colonial policy is a striking answer to Wallace and other imperialist and social-imperialist prophets. Far from encouraging industrialization and raising living standards, it has deliberately sought to retain Indonesia in all its pristine backwardness.

Outside of the mining and extractive industries, oil for example, and some processing, the main activity is cultivation on huge private and government-owned estates. Almost the whole output of these plantations is exported - some 54% of the total agricultural export. Cultivation of food crops - mainly rice - is allotted to native farmers to do in their spare time or slack season. An average native holding is .9 hectares. Food crops pay very little. Sharecropping, payment in kind, etc. are very prevalent. There is a class of middlemen who take a large cut of the profits; traders and speculators take liens on land or crops.

One Dutch professor explains that the theory is to keep the native tied to his original village community. To this end, Dutch imperialism works thru native village chiefs in a manner similar to Britain's arrangements with Indian native princes. Since the bulk of plantation cultivation is seasonal, they hope the peasant will feed himself when he's not working on the estates and will have a reserve to fall back on no matter how low wages are.

"...the presence in the Indies of an inexhaustible supply of simple

labor available in the villages is an even more important prerequisite for the success of foreign enterprise than the cheapness of the land." (Boeke, "The Structure of Netherlands Indian Economy," p. 133)

The tie with the village enables capitalists and government "to regard the labor supply as a floating capital asset, to transfer all the regular liabilities involved to the account of the village and the relatives of the laborer, to dismiss a man without feeling any further responsibility or troubling themselves about the lot of the unemployed in any way. And besides, this same tie enables the employer to cut wages much more freely and sharply in times of depression than he otherwise would." (ibid p. 137)

The system of contracting labor for work in neighboring islands also depends on the maintenance of a primitive village economy which barely keeps the potential labor supply alive. Overpopulation helps this barbaric policy along.

The maintaining primitive methods of cultivation, Dutch capitalism has fastened itself onto native private rice culture. Because of the inadequacy of the food supply, the backward condition of farming, the peasant is heavily in debt. As in all decaying agrarian systems, the role of money-lender or usurer is large. Dutch imperialism has taken over more and more of the money-lender's province.

The once communally-owned village lands have been stolen. Dependence of the small producer on his little plot is thus intensified and his means of subsistence lowered. He is at the mercy of plantation- or mine-owner or bank. Money-lending has been organized into cooperative credit associations and banking loans. In this manner, Dutch capitalism is involved in private small native agriculture and receives a handsome profit. This relationship alone reveals how completely imperialism becomes intertwined with the most backward, pre-capitalist production methods and how it is concerned to preserve and not to abolish them.

Capitalists on the island do not rely solely on maintenance of precapitalist farming for their labor supply. Much more direct methods are used. Indentured and contract labor have been widespread. Workers are taken on for a certain period during which they are practically slaves of their employers. Kidnapping is common. The "penal sanction" is enforced. This law automatically extends without pay the "contract" of anyone who leaves his job. Thus an adequate supply of slave labor is assured for private capitalist or government. There is much talk of "liberalizing" these laws. But they still exist. Boeke gives the dynamics of this "easing up."

"...the crisis and the depression had combined to increase available labor to such an extent that the entrepreneurs were able, easily and with a certain profit to themselves, to make good any deficiency in their coolie force by hiring free laborers, in regard to whom they were much less bound with respect to wages and working conditions than they had been in the case of the indentured coolies." (ibid p. 150-1)

The government also requires forced labor in payment of taxes. This labor is sometimes performed on the "public domain," sometimes on certain private lands. Since the overwhelming majority don't have money, this feudal practice remains despite recent "modifications."

On this background of overpopulation, starvation, forced labor, it is not surprising that wages are 14-20c a day. Only certain industries have a maximum of 17 hours a day for women and 15 for child labor. Less than 10% is literate. No tuition is free despite government appropriations for education. Death takes a terrible toll from malaria even tho 95% of the world's quinine is produced here.

IV. Preservation of all the worst features of precapitalist economy together with the worst features of capitalism present the revolution in Indonesia with many serious problems. The proletariat is small and relatively young. A comparatively small number are associated in factory production. According to the 1930 census, approximately 14-1/3 million were employed in production of raw materials; only 2 1/2 million in industry and transport. Native labor is employed almost exclusively in agriculture. Europeans and some Chinese are in the skilled professions and trades. Only 6% of Java's population lives in cities of over 10,000 as opposed to 49% in France, 56% in US, 80% in England.

Chronic resentment thus does not have as effective a focal point as in more industrially developed countries. On the other hand, imperialism's policy of victimizing all sections of the colonial population has created anti-imperialist sentiment that is well-nigh universal.

The organized nationalist movement apparently lacks the scope of the one in India, e.g. While the pro-British imperialism statements of Soekarno and his successor are no worse than some of Gandhi's their hold on the masses appears to be far less. There is a smaller base in Indonesia than in India for the native bourgeoisie. Dutch imperialism has throttled native capitalist development more effectively than British imperialism in India. The narrowness of their ground accounts for the native bourgeoisie's readiness to play along with Japan, US, Britain, even Holland, rather than with the armed masses.

In 1939 the Parindra, a federation of "moderate" nationalist parties, and the Gerindo, a more "extreme" grouping, united to form the Gapi. Its program stopped short of complete independence. The party agitated for self-government within the Dutch empire. According to Raymond Kennedy in the FAR EASTERN SURVEY (5/25/45 "Indonesian Politics and Parties"), the Gapi was composed mainly of Europeanized native students, local patriots, etc. Petty bourgeois and bourgeois elements, in short. 2 other outfits - the PPBB, composed of native government officials, and the MIAI, a federation of Islamic societies, remained outside the Gapi but fell in with its policies.

This timidity and cringing before Dutch imperialism characterizes the native bourgeoisie. Their weakness and indecisiveness probably means that the peasantry are not as much under their sway as in other countries where their base in the economy is stronger. It opens up the possibility that the peasantry can be more easily weaned away from a bourgeois nationalist program to a revolutionary proletarian one.

It would be fatal in this situation to subordinate a program of proletarian revolution to a bourgeois nationalist program. This would create for the native bourgeoisie a mass base in the form of a movement that does not go beyond their program.

A Soviet Indonesia is the only possible program today. The key question is expropriation and nationalization of foreign investments. Unless this is done there is no possibility of independence. To leave the imperialists' power intact. The nationalist leadership by guaran-

teering the inviolability of the property reveal their essentially pro-imperialist character. From these people only defeat and capitulation can be expected.

Achievement of independence from imperialist rule requires a social revolution. The national bourgeoisie as a property-owning class, will not expropriate the major holdings on the islands. Their desire is for its peaceful transferral to their hands - or a larger share of the profits. The peasantry will follow the class which demonstrates it has the answer to chronic starvation, disease, imperialist oppression.

The proletariat, truly divorced from all ties with the exploiting bourgeoisie, is the only class in position to carry thru confiscation of foreign holdings. By building organs of power to take over and administer these holdings the working class will counterpose its power both to the foreign imperialists and the national bourgeoisie.

All calls for independence which do not carry this struggle thru to the end are paving the way for defeat. Once the battle to get rid of imperialism has begun it cannot stop at bourgeois democratic demands. Independence is not an abstraction. It means riddance of the main exploiter and oppressor. It means a Soviet Indonesia. There is no middle ground between a Netherlands East Indies and a Soviet Indonesia.

To achieve this in so backward a country special care must be exerted to win the peasantry, overwhelming majority of the population. Democratic demands for land distribution, for cheap credit thru nationalized banks etc. are the key. These must be linked to creation of soviets - workers' power - as the only way to accomplish them. To omit these demands altogether would also mean to abandon the situation to the native bourgeoisie and ultimately the imperialists.

V. The leaders and organizations of the working class in the US are strangely silent on these problems. Here and there one will find an article on the situation in Java, a meeting, an official protest. But to take a few samples at random:

The DAILY WORKER is very much concerned with China - to which one can have no possible objection. After all there is civil war there. But Indonesia? A small news report. The rest of the paper concentrates on local and national affairs. Maybe concern for China is sectarian - support to the Communist Party there? The NEW LEADER is much the same except that it bothers itself with neither China, Java nor Indo-China. The MILITANT features Indonesia in somewhat lesser type than the strike wave here and can't even go beyond supporting independence in the abstract. The FIGHTING WORKER warns the Javanese that the national bourgeoisie is no good. The union papers worried about the conference with Truman.

This apathy reflects how deeply the imperialist ideology has soaked into the movement. It is no accident that just at the time when US is emerging as an openly imperialist power, the strongest in the world, the labor movement finds little to say about this new role. It is no accident that the Wallace ideology of new markets for capitalism is picked up by the union bureaucracy and the social reformists. It is no accident that the centrists narrow down their activities to cover the trade union field and adjust their program to a concept of expanding US capitalism. It is no accident that ultra-lefts reject the struggle for right of self-determination on the part of small nations and colonies. All these actions conform to the needs of US imperialism,

these organizations act objectively as its agents within the working class: There is complete failure on their part to attack US imperialism - not only for bad living conditions here - but for shooting and killing fellow-workers on the other side of the globe. There is complete failure to express the international solidarity of labor.

Compare to the passivity of the American movement, the reaction of the masses in other countries. The dockworkers' strikes in solidarity with the revolt, contact established between the Indo-Chinese and Javanese movements, protests in India. This is no time to fob oneself off with transitional programs or panaceas in the hope that at some future date the real, revolutionary program or organization will emerge. History is posing the question now. Either it will be answered or victorious capitalism will victimize even the formula-spinners.

The success of the Indonesia revolt depends on international working class support, on the success of the Indo-Chinese, Chinese, Indian revolutions. It depends also on how effectively the workers of the imperialist countries stop manufacture and shipment of arms to be used against the Indonesian uprising. Because of the richness and strategic importance of the area, imperialism will fight to the last soldier and last bourgeois nationalist puppet to hold power. The Indonesian masses will need the boldest revolutionary policy, the firmest determination, the clearest understanding. They will need organized support from workers everywhere. The Australian, Hindu, Chinese dockworkers' actions must be magnified into demonstrations of solidarity in the heart of every imperialist country in the world. Here is the opportunity to deal a death blow to imperialism and imperialist war! Here is the opportunity to express the accumulated bitterness and disgust of the oppressed everywhere! Here is the opportunity to end the myth of white supremacy and the racial divisions fostered by imperialism!

The revolutionary party in the US will be built of those people who are capable of reacting to these facts; capable of seizing on the difficulties and defeats of US imperialism and of supporting actively the revolutionary outbreaks in other countries which bring on these difficulties and defeats. Java and the whole Pacific situation are a touchstone to determine who among the American workers are truly internationalist revolutionists. Support to our fellow-workers in the Pacific cannot be separated from the organization of protests against the role of US imperialism. It is thus organically tied up with the building of a Marxist organization in the US. Let those of us who are for the building of such an organization take a big step toward it by uniting in support of the Indonesian, Indo-Chinese and Chinese revolutionary struggles.